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AUTHOR Lipman, Matthew
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ABSTRACT

The inclusion of philosophy as part of the elementary school curriculum is discussed in this paper. A definite trend toward specifically including ethics and logic offers a starting point for a philosophy course as part of the general curriculum or as a separate course of study. The author begins by presenting a general analysis of the recent interest in grade school philosophy. Next he discusses the role of research in determining the suitability of philosophy as part of the grade school curriculum suggesting that a philosophy course could make a significant and lasting improvement in general academic performance. Two experiments utilizing philosophy for pedagogical purposes are currently being conducted in New Jersey and Texas. Taking stock of what is going on today, a breakthrough of philosophy into the elementary school curriculum has occurred. Key factors in the breakthrough include the writing of the first work in children's philosophy and the founding of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children--its publications program, curriculum development, teacher training, and research projects. Suggestions for the future of elementary school philosophy are also presented. (JR)

GRADE SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY:

HOW COME AND WHERE TO?

Matthew Lipman
Director, Institute for the Advancement
of Philosophy for Children
Montclair State College

Why The Sudden Interest in Grade-School Philosophy?

Throughout its entire history, philosophy has been thought of as a course exclusively for adults. Indeed, until a few decades ago, the question was not whether to introduce it to the pre-college student, but whether it might not be well to restrict it solely to students in the later years of college. There is little doubt that the bulk of philosophers thought of their subject as an exclusive one, which could not be made available to the masses of adults, or even to the masses of college students, to say nothing of the pre-college population. It was assumed that philosophy was a subject for which a fairly high degree of motivation and intellectual ability were pre-requisites. And since philosophers themselves were convinced that their subject was unteachable to children, it never occurred to the general public to criticize the lack of a philosophy component in the elementary school curriculum.

But while philosophy in general could be considered, without a single dissenting voice, to be alien to the elementary school curriculum, the exclusion of two particular areas of philosophy has long caused uneasiness in some quarters. These two areas are logic and ethics.

Classical education, both in the ancient and in the medieval worlds, had always included formal logic as a basic ingredient, but that ingredient had long ago been abandoned in the organization of the modern educational curriculum. The history of psychological experimentation in the twentieth century would probably reveal dozens of experiments attempting to ascertain the feasibility of teaching formal logic to

children, and while the results have often been positive, educators have understandably responded with indifference: why bring one more obnoxious subject into the curriculum,when students are already repelled by what they are presently being given? One cannot fault the educators' objection: there was little reason to believe that the syllogism was anything but a sterile and empty formula. Students' needs could be better served by developing the "critical thinking" portion of the language arts program. (Little did most educators realize that "critical thinking" and "critical reading" were rather haphazard simplifications of what had long been taught on the college level as "informal logic.")

But many educators continued to be unhappy about the slovenly reasoning habits of many elementary school students--the inability to draw inferences which seemed to adults to be utterly obvious; the reckless jumping to conclusions; the insensitivity to the fallacies inherent in crass appeals to bigotry, ambition, and the need for affection; and the assumption that if everyone has a right to an opinion, every opinion must be equally right.

Meanwhile, an anxiety continued to percolate in the PTA's and among portions of the educational cadres, to the effect that the schools had an obligation to introduce students to what was traditionally called "ethics." It was felt that the decline of parental authority and the questioning of religious authority had to be compensated for by means of increased efforts on the part of the schools to make students aware of "moral values." The avenue in some schools lay in giving children courses in the history of ethical theory (an approach which doubtless helped many children catch up on the sleep they had lost while engaged in television watching or other pursuits.) In other schools, it was

thought necessary to develop courses in "decision-making," on the apparent assumption that children need to be more decisive. (One theme that runs through most adult thinking about children is that children's problems are simpler than adult problems, and therefore it should be easier for children to be decisive. Most adults do not seem to acknowledge that children's problems—about who they are, about what happens to them when they die, about why they have to do what we make them do, about what their minds are and what their bodies are--happen to be pretty much the same as adult problems, and no less complex or troublesome. Using our handy double-standard, we assume that an adult who hesitates to make a choice is morally sensitive, while a child who hesitates is thought to be morally irresponsible.) Still other schools have adopted techniques claiming to "clarify values" rather than impose them. Children are encouraged to "get their values out on the table," although it is quite unclear what they are to do once the "values" are produced, with the result that such a course may well be more productive of moral relativism than of moral objectivity. Values, after all, are what we want after reflection, analysis, and inquiry, not just what we happen to desire at any particular moment. Such reflection and analysis would have to be philosophical in character, but the philosophical component in such courses is notoriously deficient. The result, all too often, is that this type of course ends up by being either relativistic, nihilistic, or subtly reflective of the teacher's own value-system.

In brief, a society apprehensive about the amorality of its younger generation is increasingly turning to the schools to provide an ethics component to the educational process. But such a component simply cannot be provided if it has been detached from the general

process of philosophical reflection. Ethical thinking is impossible unless it is understood as philosophical thinking applied to moral problems or situations. Ethics is not a self-contained discipline. To apply it requires the bringing to bear of the entire body of philosophical techniques upon the issue at hand. It requires, above all, unconditional respect for the process of inquiry and analysis, allowing the process to dictate the product (the decision), rather than permitting the hot pursuit of the decision (as in "decision-making" courses) to permit neglect of the preparatory process of reflection.

The most subtle depreciation of the child's ability to think for himself on metaphysical, aesthetic, ethical and other matters is implicit in the approach which claims that such thinking is inevitably slated to proceed by "stages of growth," so that at each stage a child formulates issues in a manner characteristic of that stage, and the teacher can do no more than encourage him to adopt the stance of the next higher-up stage on the scale. This is an echo of nineteenth-century notions about the differences between "primitive" and "civilized" mentalities as well as of the conception that an individual's moral ideas are simply a reflection of his "class-situation." In its condescending way, this approach disparages the child's ability, on any level, to size up the peculiarities of the situation he is in and come to an appropriate and reasonable conclusion, regardless of the "level" at which he is supposed to think. It disparages the child's moral responsibility and creativity, and confuses the social development of the child (to which standards of justice are applicable) with the moral awareness of the child (to which ethical standards are applicable). In brief, such an approach is based upon philosophical

credentials as unsound as its "scientific" credentials, and there is ample justification for questioning its claim to represent an authentic instance of philosophy on the elementary school level.

Perhaps the first hint of a changed attitude towards the possibility of the introduction of philosophy into the elementary school curriculum is to be found in Dewey's suggestion that philosophy can be taken to be the general theory of education. The notion is undoubtedly obscure, but it can be interpreted fruitfully to mean that, at every stage of the educational process, the methodology of philosophy--with its stress on dialogue, impartiality and comprehensiveness—should be the integrating and binding force of the curriculum.

But Dewey's suggestion went as unheeded among educational theorists as among philosophers in general. When, in 1958, the American Philosophical Association set up a committee to report on philosophy before the college level, its expectations were that this could only mean philosophy as a high-school enrichment program--and the report fulfilled those expectations. It said virtually nothing about elementary school philosophy. A few voices murmured in the wilderness, but as they had no programs to offer, only hopes and wishes and recommendations, it is not surprising that they were paid little attention.

In the intervening years, however, another factor came to be an indirect, but nonetheless an important consideration: the matter of teaching jobs in philosophy. As long as philosophy was thought to be a subject restricted to the college years, and as long as philosophy was a subject one could do nothing with (as far as jobs were concerned) other than to teach it, then those who enrolled as graduate

students in philosophy could set their sights on nothing else, upon graduation, than a career at the college or university level. Aspiration for positions at lower educational levels had to be considered absurd: virtually no states offered certification for high school teaching of philosophy, and certainly none at all countenanced its teaching in the elementary school on a certified basis. But the secret of the intrinsic delight of teaching philosophy was difficult to conceal; students continued to register for graduate school training in philosophy, despite the paucity of college positions. At the present time, there are about 10 qualified job applicants in philosophy for every position, and the desolation and despair among those applicants is difficult to encounter without being moved by the virtual hopelessness of their plight, given their aspirations.

In brief, then, philosophy has for a long time been a field which has been cultivated by a Mandarin-like elite. While virtually all other subjects were moving down from the college level into the secondary and elementary schools (e.g., mathematics, anthropology, foreign languages, economics, etc.), philosophers ignored the trend and yet, at the same time, continued to wring their hands about the difficulty of finding jobs for their would-be colleagues--which is to say that they behaved in a way that was essentially self-contradictory. It was only when they saw the economic implications of elementary school philosophy that many of them began to countenance it as a desirable innovation.

But elsewhere, the need for philosophy in terms of its educational merits alone was being felt, although it could not be so identified. Educators faced with the incredible fragmentation of

the contemporary elementary school curriculum longed for a central discipline, a central methodology which would impart a sense of common inquiry to all branches of learning and a sense of participation to all members of the school community. There was a need for dialogue, but no one thought to identify philosophy as the provider of dialogue, as the unifying methodological discipline, as the needed agency of community, Lacking any initiative from philospphers, elementary school educators looked elsewhere for salvation. Such salvation, they were told from one quarter, would come from the three R's: as though, when the spirit fails, the letter alone might be the source of life. On the other hand, salvation was promised from the three X's: existentialism, sense experience, and ecstasy. Confronted with such fragmentization and polarization, it was little wonder that many educators were subject to a sense of vertigo and recurrent feelings of unreality.

It was not only a failure of communication among the various segments of the educational community that caused the unwillingness to investigate the potentialities of philosophy as an elementary school subject. It was also the deep-seated suspicion of philosophy as corrosive of established beliefs, as productive of nothing more than scepticism and relativism. The ideal is everywhere professed that we are a nation in which people think for themselves. Now as a general rule adults think for themselves only if they have developed the habit of doing so from earliest childhood on. But as a society, we do not really want to see children thinking for themselves. So the contradiction remains between what we practice regarding children and what we profess regarding adults. (Or rather,

the consistency remains between the children whom we refuse to permit intellectual independence and the intellectually dependent adults they grow up to be.) An electorate that elected and re-elected the white-collar hoodlums who brought down upon the nation its most recent disaster can hardly take a prize for fearless, astute and independent intellectual judgment.

When Did Elementary School Philosophy Become Feasible?

Possibly there have always been individuals who dreamed of a day when philosophy would be taught in the elementary schools, and who even went so far as to drop a word here and there that such a state of affairs would be desirable. But there is as much in common between such hoping and its implementation as there is between gazing in wonder at the stars and the science of astronomy.

But, it will be objected, there have always been teachers—outstanding teachers, to be sure--who, in their classroom discussions, penetrated the arcana of society in their discussions with their pupils. There have always been teachers who have conducted genuinely philosophicaldialogues with children of all ages; and there have been parents who have done the same. So surely, philosophy for children is nothing new.

It must be acknowledged that there is a great deal of truth in the contention just presented. There have always been brilliant teachers, many of them quite charismatic, who have awed and fascinated us with their power of evoking superlative intellectual and creative performances from their young charges. We read Herndon and Kohl and Kozol and others, and we are moved to share joyously in the thrill of their achievements in the classroom. But when we ask the

or ourselves, how they did it--what was their method (for how can we discipline ourselves to be like them if we cannot discern their method)--they are mute, and so are we. No doubt they are beautiful people, but the millions of youngsters who come into the world every year cannot reasonably expect hundreds of thousands of beautiful people to be available to teach them. They'll be luckyif they can expect just a handful. Even gifted teachers need the assistance of a text.

Philosophy in the literary vehicle of the aphorism or the poem begins with the pre-Socratics, and philosophy as an art of dialogue may have begun with Socrates himself. But philosophy as a subject for study in the schools had to wait upon the Dialogues of Plato. In the area of philosophy for children, it can likewise be said that it begins as an educational subject only when it develops a special genre of literature of its own: the philosophical children's story.

A word of caution must be expressed at this point. There are those philosophers today who make a point of the fact that certain incidents in existing children's literature can be used to illustrate certain interests fashionable among professional philosophers. For example, it is pointed out that the Tin Woodman in The Wizard of Oz, being composed of totally new parts, must have had an "identity problem." Surely it is a rare child to whom such an esoteric thought would occur, and surely it is a feckless teacher who would take the trouble to explain this point at any length to children who hadn't thought of it themselves. (It might well be added that the teacher who uses children's literature to point up an esoteric issue proper to adult philosophy is no better than the clergyman who tears a novel or song or poem to tatters in an effort to extract from it a Sunday morning moral; both sell their souls for a pot of message.)

A genuinely philosophical children's literature, therefore, must be created. We cannot expect to find it ready-made, and we cannot desecrate the literature that exists by ripping its themes out of context and treating them as philosophical concepts. But a literature can be constructed which lends itself precisely to this purpose.

Such a genre would be unprecedented--not the novel forced to be a text, but the text taking the form of a novel. For in effect, this suggests a revolution of enormous scope, in which the traditional didactic text would be replaced by a literary text that would be intrinsically enjoyable, intrinsically meaningful, and intrinsically valuable to the child. Instead of the text so inherently unattractive that its only justification could be--like bad-tasting medicine--its healthful results, one might begin to see ahead to the day when children's texts would be as delightful as they were instructive. Indeed, their beauty itself would be informative, and their informational content itself would be so organized and presented as to be a delight.

If such a literature could indeed be created, it would represent an end-run around the educational establishment. In fact, the introduction of philosophy into the elementary school curriculum has been accomplished by a series of such end-runs. But the first step had to be the construction of a written instance of philosophy for children.

Such a book would serve a manifold of purposes. It would act as a model of dialogue. (If we sometimes wonder at how inept children are at conversation, we might pause to ask ourselves what <u>models</u> they have of children's conversation, equivalent to the models adults have of adult conversation.) It would act as a springboard for discovery processes. (That is, it would hint at ideas which could be elaborated on and developed into substantial philosophical concepts.)

It would enable the child to learn the difference between logical and illogical thinking in a relatively painless fashion. (It would also try to indicate to him the occasions to which logical thought is appropriate, and those to which illogical thought might be preferable.)

Perhaps such books existed before Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery, but if so, their existence has been most cleverly concealed, and it would be valuable to find out more about them. In the meantime, we have only Harry.

What Has Been the Role of Research?

Before discussing the role which research has played in determining the suitability of philosophy for the elementary school curriculum, it may be well to mention the traditional prevalence of hostility among many practitioners of the humanities towards experimental research in those areas. The suspicion has generally been that efficiency-minded administrators, eager to cut costs by cutting faculty, would be tempted to slash away at those fields that could not justify their existence by pointing to empirical evidence as to their efficacy. These misgivings have not, of course, been unfounded: obviously there have been college administrators who have looked askance at fields whose only claim to curricular inclusion seemed to be that they had always been so included. More importantly, the quality of educational research has generally been so abyssmally low that one could not help questioning either the motives or the intelligence of an administrator who would look to such research for guidance and direction. The assumption persists, therefore, that researchers who seek to study the impact of traditional humanistic subjects upon the

student population are up to no good--and obviously this assumption includes philosophy in its purview.

But a counter-suspicion persists (the academic community is obviously rife with suspicions) that if a course of study makes a difference in a student's life, that difference ought somehow to be measurable. And if the difference it makes can't be discovered, maybe the course of study doesn't really offer the student any benefits he can't equally well acquire in other ways. As William James would say, there are no significant differences among things that don't make significant differences. It is this notion that underlay the recourse to experimentation with philosophy as a possible course of study in the elementary school.

It has already been indicated that experiments have not infrequently been carried on to determine the suitability of logic for children. But the logic presented has almost always been in a context devoid of meaningfulness to the child. Logicians, proud of the fact that their discipline applies to meaningless as well as to significant statements, seem to have an occupational preference for examples that are humorous, absurd or trivial, on the assumption that students can only be distracted or disturbed by more serious materials. The opposite is more likely to be the case: one substantial reason that logic seems so idiotic to most students is that it is presented so often as applying to idiotic situations rather than to any problems that genuinely touch upon their lives.

Logic is, no doubt, the disciplinary skeleton of philosophy, but ideas are its flesh and blood. An experiment with philosophy as a subject must take both aspects--logic and ideas--into account. This

is what the pilot project of 1970 in the Rand School in Montclair seemed to indicate: a philosophy course might be able to make a broad, significant and lasting improvement in children's general academic performance. What was now needed was replication of that experiment on a large scale, and using teachers without previous philosophical training. Such an experiment is now under way, in New Jersey and in Texas. If it proves successful, another end-run around existing assumptions will have taken place.

The Current Situation

Some of the foregoing remarks may seem to be negative, in the sense that they represent a critique of those who in the past have failed to make use of the obvious potentials which philosophy has always possessed for the organization of childhood education, and of those who now claim (with little supporting evidence) to be doing so today. Let us take stock of what is going on today, in the sense of the constructive utilization of philosophy for pedagogical purposes.

It may be well to note that such utilization can take several forms: philosophy can be appropriated as a subject-area, and transformed, by simplification, into an elementary school subject, to be inserted into the curriculum along with other subjects such as arithmetic, reading, spelling, and so on. Or, philosophy can be seen as an ideal way of organizing the somehat chaotic field now known as "language arts," so as to encompass all forms of thoughtful and creative expression. Or, finally and most ambitiously, philosophy may be taken as the central methodology or armature around which all subjects can be organized, in that it provides the model of discovery and participation that can be utilized by any teacher for any subject. In this sense, philosophy for children is not just another pedagogical technique, like Montessori or value clarification, or body language, but is a fundamental disci-

pline which cannot plug into any of those others, but which allows any of the others to plug into it.

In the light of the foregoing remarks, it should be evident that the mere dicussion by children of moral issues (i.e., a "bull-session" about values) is not, ipso facto, philosophy, not even if that discussion is conducted under the guidance of an impartial adult. On the other hand, an elementary school course in philosophical thinking about all sorts of issues--aesthetic, metaphysical, economic, religious, political, or whatever--is ipso facto a course in elementary ethics, in that its practical effect is to improve the child's sensitivity to the complexity of human experience, to the understanding of his own perspective upon events, to the value of appreciating other people and their points of view, and to realization of his own powers of logical and innovative thought, all of which discoveries are discoveries simultaneously of the prerequisites of being a moral individual.

Moreover, philosophy for children can only be the encouragement among children of philosophical thinking. In no way is it realistic to conceive of elementary school philosophy as the transmission to children of information about philosophy--such as that Kant was a German Idealist or that Plato was a Greek who wrote The Republic. To think that one is teaching a child philosophy merely by informing him of certain facts about the subject is to caricature the very nature of philosophy for children. Furthermore, the encouragement of philosophical thinking among children should not aspire to the creation of child-philosophers, or even of children who are precociously wise. Any child, whatever the acuteness of his intellectual powers, can benefit from philosophical discussions, because the problems of life are his problems as much as anyone else's, and any child, like any adult, can benefit

from an improvement in his ability to formulate and consider such problems.

If the above-mentioned criteria are taken to be the criteria for the breakthrough of philosophy into the elementary school curriculum, then the key factors in that breakthrough have been (1) the writing of the first work in children's philosophy; (2) the establishment of the first institute dealing with children's philosophy; and (3) the conducting of large-scale research into the actual impact of philosophy upon children's thought-processes, creativity and social development. These will be discussed in turn.

1. To date, Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery is the only book specifically designed to introduce children to philosophy. Written in 1969, it is in the form of a novel dealing with children who are roughly eleven or twelve years of age, and who are beginning to be interested in their own thought processes. (They are not particularly interested, it should be noted, in their own psychological or physiological processes insofar as these are the conditions of thinking: they never refer, for example, to cutaway diagrams of the human brain, or to sibling rivalry, or after-imagery. Nor is this any great loss. The average layman can understand human thought processes by examining brain diagrams about as well as a child can understand erotic love by examining cutaway diagrams of human genitalia.)

The book consists of seventeen chapters, in some of which the children are to be found discovering some of the more general principles of human reasoning and inference, and in some of which they apply their discoveries to conversations about education, the creation of the world, the nature of the mind, the difference between reasons and causes, the child's obligations to adult authority, treating people as

things rather than as human beings, and so on. Adults play a relatively small role in the book, and the vocabulary in which the book is written is roughly on the fourth-grade level. Philosophic terms and distinctions are virtually never used, and nowhere in the book do the children ever come to realize that they are engaged in philosophy or logic.

The value of a text for encouraging philosophical thinking is certainly enormous. Without such a text, the burden of introducing philosophical topics and focusing upon them is placed squarely upon the shoulders of the teacher. Since the college teacher of philosophy, with all of his experience, is rarely willing to confront his class without the mediation of a philosophic text to discuss, it is unreasonable to expect an elementary school teacher to be any different. In time, of course, there will be other works in philosophy for children, in addition to Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery. But is is unlikely that philosophy for children will flourish without reliance upon some such vehicle.

2. The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children was founded in 1974, under the auspices of Montclair State College, in an effort to develop in a more efficient way the programs which were already in progress on the Montclair State campus, and which had received national recognition. Aided by several grants, the Institute has been able to accelerate work on its various projects:

a. Publication of its materials. Tired of hearing from commercial publishers that "there is no market for this kind of product," the Institute has begun to publish on its own, and has already produced two works: Harry, and an explanation ~~of~~ to the teacher of the goals,

objectives and methods of teaching children philosophy. In effect, this represents another end-run around an otherwise very formidable obstacle. (The Institute is now readying its first Teacher's Manual for publication.)

b. Development of additional curricula. The Institute is presently organizing a staff for the preparation of three additional programs. The project will take approximately three years, but when completed, it will be possible to offer interested schools a continuous philosophy curriculum from kindergarten through eighth grade. It is hoped that, if reading materials of sufficient liveliness and depth can be developed, children might be able to accord such written materials an unusual degree of interested attention. And if they find such materials consistently meaningful, it might even convert such children to reading! Perhaps even to school!

c. The Institute as an information center. Public curiosity about children's philosophy has to date been consistently sympathetic, but rather bewildered as to "how it's done." Obviously a great deal of explaining is necessary, and to expedite matters, the Institute is preparing a demonstration film showing classes in session, teacher workshops, and a dramatization of a portion of the children's novel. Such a presentation, it is hoped, will provide a more vivid realization of what is involved than an exclusively narrative approach.

d. The training of teachers. Obviously it is not possible to wait until existing teacher colleges reorient themselves and begin training their students to teach philosophy on the elementary school level. The only alternative that seems feasible, therefore, is to conduct summer workshops in which teachers can acquire the skills to teach philosophy in a manner appropriate to the educational level of

their pupils. The first such summer workshop will be held at Montclair State College in the summer of 1975. It will be a model, it is hoped, for a network of such workshops to be held in future years throughout the country.

3. Most important, the Institute is engaged in a research project of considerable scope, aimed at determining the effects of introducing philosophy into a public-school system, where it is taught by teachers generally unfamiliar with philosophy and unacquainted with logical theory. The project, six months in the planning stage, and almost a year in the testing and classroom teaching stage, is now in full swing in both Newark, New Jersey and Denton, Texas. The experiment has been designed by Rutgers University's Institute for Cognitive Studies, which is also in charge of testing and evaluation. A book-sized set of statistical results should be available sometime in the summer of 1975.

The Future of Elementary School Philosophy

The impact upon school children of from eight to twelve continuous years of acquaintance with philosophical ideas and philosophic method is likely to be a college and university population quite different from anything known in the past. Children would arrive at higher education with a feeling for intellectual clarity and rigor, with an intellectual objectivity and intensity of motivation to deal with scientific and cultural pursuits to an extent and degree not previously known in our society. The colleges in turn would be able to offer courses of a greater degree of sophistication and concentration than in the past.

The impact upon the existing cadre of teachers also appears wholesome. To the extent that philosophy becomes popular, those capable of teaching it can be drawn from the ranks of those already certified, so

that no shift of personnel need occur. But the introduction of philosophy into the elementary school will ultimately mean the gradual acquisition by teachers generally of a philosophical depth and dimension to their outlook, and conveyed to their pupils, which was previously lacking.

The impact upon present and future college philosophy students, however, appears to be particularly interesting. The entry of philosophy into the primary school will mean that many students now despairing of ever acquiring college teaching positions in philosophy will begin to think of ways of becoming certified to teach on the elementary and secondary levels. And students entering college may never have occasion to shift their goals: they will aspire from the first to elementary school philosophy positions, thereby at once improving the competence of teachers in that area, and decreasing the pressure upon college philosophy departments.

That this will actually occur is far from being a certainty. At the moment, one can only point to straws in the wind: the considerable degree of public interest the topic has aroused, and the actions quite a few schools have initiated to begin pilot projects. It is significant that some of these are in large urban areas with serious problems in their inner-city schools. Newark is now the most advanced city in the nation with respect to the depth of its involvement with elementary philosophy. But Baltimore has already sent observers to Newark's teacher workshops, and is now setting up its own experimental pilot project, with a view to a city-wide application of the new approach. Oakland is presently seeking Title III funds to enable it to set up a project of considerable scale. And throughout the country, in dozens of smaller communities, individual teachers are trying to determine

if the program will work for them.

Also interested are private and parochial schools, and for good reason. Such schools can stay alive only if they provide something different from the public schools, and better. The idea of philosophy in the Sunday School is challenging to many religions which have become exhausted struggling with problems of the indoctrination of creeds, and which are willing to acknowledge that helping a child to think is at least as sacred a task as is helping a child to feel--an activity which many religious schools have been involved in over the past decade or two, often with more enthusiasm than prudence.

Finally, one cannot overlook the opportunity many parents have already begun to note in the availability of a text which is mutually interesting to both parents and children. For to the extent that some parents are dissatisfied with the intellectual challenge of the schools their children presently attend, such parents are increasingly likely to explore the benefits of exploring philosophy together with their children at home. One could think of worse things that might happen to the American family.

Yet, in all of this, there is a danger that some professional philosophers have already begun to recognize: that unless adequate standards and criteria are staked out, the field will soon be flooded with well-meaning but inept practitioners, and with charlatans and quacks. It is something the American Philosophical Association, whose executive echelons have suddenly been delighted to discover the existence of elementary school philosophy, is now beginning to consider.

It is possible that all of this is just a flash in the pan: a momentary fad or enthusiasm which will just as quickly pass away. If so, it is hard to imagine what new and fresh approaches will be devised to improve American education;certainly there are no more major

humanistic studies still at the college level, waiting to be introduced into the schools. Philosophy was the last of its kind, and the most significant. No other subject can develop, as philosophy can, the intellectual flexibility, the skill in handling concepts, the appreciation for cognitive precision and clarity, or the rigor in the derivation of inferences so necessary to the full development of a human being's powers.

Hardly better, it would seem, would be the sort of thing which has overtaken innovations in the past: they became victims of their own admirers and devotees, or became bureaucratized beyond recognition.

Just what will happen is hard to tell. The elementary philosophy movement is still embryonic. But it is too late, fortunately, for an abortion.